Global Pandemic
Capitalism *in* Crisis
Rising Totalitarianism
Strategies *of* Resistance

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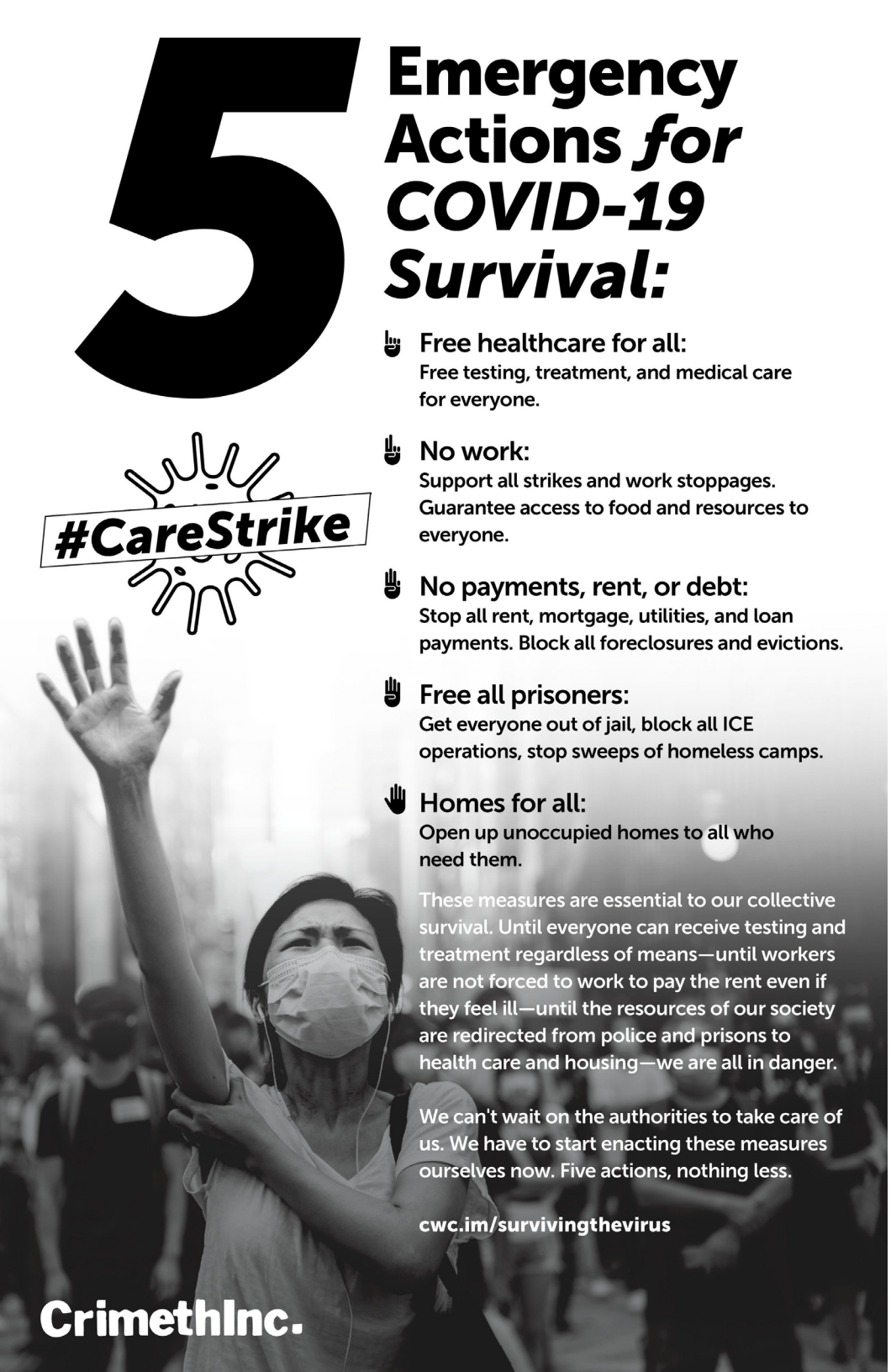
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Emergency Actions for COVID-19 Survival:
Free healthcare for all:
Free testing, treatment, and medical care for everyone.
No work:
Support all strikes and work stoppages. Guarantee access to food and resources to everyone.
#CareStrike
No payments, rent, or debt:
Stop all rent, mortgage, utilities, and loan payments. Block all foreclosures and evictions.
Free all prisoners:
Get everyone out of jail, block all ICE operations, stop sweeps of homeless camps.
Homes for all:
Open up unoccupied homes to all who need them.
These measures are essential to our collective survival. Until everyone can receive testing and treatment regardless of means—until workers are not forced to work to pay the rent even if they feel ill—until the resources of our society are redirected from police and prisons to health care and housing—we are all in danger.
We can't wait on the authorities to take care of us. We have to start enacting these measures ourselves now. Five actions, nothing less.
cwc.im/survivingthevirus
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The pandemic is not going to pass in the next few weeks. Even if strict confinement measures succeed in cutting the number of infections down to what it was a month ago, the virus could resume spreading exponentially again as soon as the measures are suspended. The current situation is likely to continue for months—sudden curfews, inconsistent quarantines, increasingly desperate conditions—though it will almost certainly shift form at some point when the tensions within it boil over. To prepare for that moment, let's protect ourselves and each other from the threat posed by the virus, think through the questions about risk and safety that the pandemic poses, and confront the disastrous consequences of a social order that was never designed to preserve our well-being in the first place.

# Surviving the Virus

Longstanding anarchist forms of organization and security have a lot to offer when it comes to surviving the pandemic and the panic it is causing.

## Form an Affinity Group

The prospect of quarantine tells us a lot about how we were already living. Those who live in close-knit families or joyous collective houses are in a much better situation than those in broken marriages and those who have big empty houses all to themselves. This is a good reminder of what really matters in life. Despite the models of safety that are represented by the bourgeois dream of nuclear family home ownership and the US foreign policy that reflects it, togetherness and care are much more important than the kind of security that depends on fencing out the whole world.

"Social distancing" must not mean total isolation. We won't be safer if our society is reduced to a bunch of atomized individuals. That would neither protect us from the virus nor from the stress of this situation nor from the power grabs that capitalists and state authorities are preparing to carry out. As much as the elderly are at risk from the virus, for example, older people are already dangerously isolated in this society; cutting them off from all contact with others will not preserve their physical or mental health. All of us need to be embedded in tight-knit groups in a way that maximizes both our safety and our collective capacity to enjoy life and take action.

Choose a group of people you trust—ideally people you share day to day life with, all of whom share similar risk factors and levels of risk tolerance. For the purposes of surviving the virus, this is your affinity group, the basic building block of decentralized anarchist organization. You don't necessarily need to live in the same building with them; the important thing is that you can cut down your risk factors to those you all share and feel comfortable with. If your group is too small, you'll be isolated—and that will especially be a problem if you get sick. If your group is too big, you'll face needless risk of infection.

Talk with each other until you arrive at a set of shared expectations as to how you will engage with the risk of contagion. This could be anything



employees through wage increases, we believe the most important thing is to build networks that can interrupt business as usual, disrupt the system as whole, and point towards the revolutionary introduction of alternative ways of living and relating. At this point, it is easier to imagine the abolition of capitalism than to imagine that even under these circumstances, it could be reformed to serve all of our needs in a just and equitable manner.

## Prison Revolts

Revolts in Brazilian and Italian prisons have already resulted in several escapes, including mass escapes. The courage of these prisoners should remind us of all the targeted populations that are kept out of public view, who will suffer the most during catastrophes like this.

It can also inspire us: rather than obeying orders and remaining in hiding as the entire world is converted into a matrix of prison cells, we can act collectively to break out.

a virtue of necessity. Countless millions who live from one paycheck to the next have lost their jobs and income already and have no way to pay April's rent. The best way to support them is for all of us to go on strike, rendering it impossible for the authorities to target everyone who does not pay. Banks and landlords should not be able to continue profiting on renters and mortgages when there is no way to earn money. That's just common sense.

This idea has already been circulating in many different forms. In Melbourne, Australia, the local branch of the Industrial Workers of the World is promoting a COVID-19 Rent Strike Pledge. Rose Caucus is calling for people to suspend rent, mortgage, and utility payments during the outbreak. In Washington state, Seattle Rent Strike is calling for the same. Chicago tenants are threatening a rent strike alongside people in Austin, St. Louis, and Texas. In Canada, there is organizing in Toronto, Kingston, and Montreal. Others have circulated documents calling for a rent and mortgage strike.

For a rent strike to succeed on a countrywide level, at least one of these initiatives will have to gain enough momentum that large numbers of people will be certain they will not be left high and dry if they commit to participating. Yet rather than waiting for a single mass organization to coordinate a massive strike from above, it is best for these efforts to begin at the grassroots level. Centralized organizations often compromise early in the process of a struggle, undercutting the autonomous efforts that give such movements power. The best thing we could do to come out of this experience stronger would be to build networks that can defend themselves regardless of decisions from on high.

### Labor and Transit Strikes

Hundreds of workers at the Atlantic shipyards in Saint-Nazaire went on strike yesterday. In Finland, bus drivers refused to take payments from riders in order to increase their safety from contagion and protest against the risks they are being exposed to, showing in the process that public transit could be free.

If ever there was a good time for the embattled and precarious working class to show strength through strikes and work stoppages, this is it. For once, much of the general population will be sympathetic, as the interruption of business as usual can also diminish the risk of the virus spreading. Rather than seeking to improve the individual circumstances of particular



from total physical isolation to remembering to use hand sanitizer after touching surfaces in public. Within your group, as long as no one has the virus, you can still hug, kiss, make food together, touch the same surfaces—as long as you agree about the level of risk you are collectively ready to tolerate and communicate about it when a new risk factor arises.

This is what anarchists call security culture—the practice of establishing a set of shared expectations to minimize risk. When we're dealing with police repression and the surveillance of the state, we protect ourselves by sharing information on a need-to-know basis. When we're dealing with a virus, we protect ourselves by controlling the vectors along which contagions can spread.

It's never possible to avoid risk altogether. The point is to determine how much risk you are comfortable with and conduct yourself in such a way that if something goes wrong, you won't have any regrets, knowing you have taken all the precautions you deemed necessary. Sharing your life with an affinity group, you get the best parts of both caution and conviviality.

## Form a Network

Of course, your affinity group alone won't suffice to meet all your needs. What if you need resources that none of you can safely access? What if you all get sick? You need to be connected to other affinity groups in a network of mutual aid, so that if any group in the network gets overwhelmed, the others can come to their aid. Participating in a network like this, you can circulate resources and support without all needing to expose yourselves to the same level of risk. The idea is that when people from different groups within the network interact, they employ much stricter safety measures, so as to minimize additional risk.

The phrase "mutual aid" has been thrown around a lot lately, even by politicians. In its proper sense, *mutual aid* does not describe a program that provides unidirectional assistance for others the way a charity organization does. Rather, it is the decentralized practice of reciprocal care via which participants in a network make sure that everyone gets what they need, so that everyone has reason to be invested in everyone else's well-being. This is not a matter of tit-for-tat exchange, but rather an interchange of care and resources that creates the sort of redundancy and resilience that can sustain a community through difficult times. Mutual aid networks thrive best when it is possible to build up reciprocal trust with others over a long period of time. You don't have to know or even like everyone else in the

network, but everyone has to give enough to the network that together, your efforts create a sense of abundance.

The framework of reciprocity might seem to lend itself to social stratification, in which people from similar social classes with similar access to resources gravitate to each other in order to get the best return on the investment of their own resources. But groups from different backgrounds can have access to a wide range of different kinds of resources. In these times, financial wealth may prove much less valuable than experience with plumbing, the ability to speak a particular dialect, or social ties in a community you never thought you'd find yourself depending on. Everyone has good cause to extend their networks of mutual aid as far and wide as possible.

The fundamental idea here is that it is our bonds with others that keep us safe, not our protection from them or our power over them. Preppers who have focused on building up a private stockpile of food, gear, and weapons are putting the pieces in place for an each-against-all apocalypse. If you put all your energy into individual solutions, leaving everyone around you to fight for survival on their own, your only hope is to outgun the competition. And even if you do—when there's no one else to turn those guns on, you'll be the last one left, and that gun will be the last tool at your disposal.

## How We Relate to Risk

The appearance of a new potentially lethal contagion compels all of us to think about how we relate to risk. What's worth risking our lives for?

On reflection, most of us will conclude that—all other things being equal—risking our lives just to keep playing our role in capitalism is not worth it. On the other hand, it might be worth it to risk our lives to protect each other, to care for each other, to defend our freedom and the possibility of living in an egalitarian society.

Just as being completely isolated is not safer for the elderly, trying to avoid risk entirely won't keep us safe. If we keep strictly to ourselves while our loved ones get sick, our neighbors die, and the police state takes away every last vestige of our autonomy, we will not be safer. There are many different kinds of risk. The time is probably coming when we will have to rethink what risks we are prepared to take in order to live with dignity.

This brings us to the question of how to survive all the needless tragedies

## Strategies of Resistance

Towards that end, we'll conclude with a few strategies for resistance that are already getting off the ground.

### Rent Strikes

In San Francisco, the housing collective Station 40 has led the way by unilaterally declaring a rent strike in response to the crisis:

"The urgency of the moment demands decisive and collective action. We are doing this to protect and care for ourselves and our community. Now more than ever, we refuse debt and we refuse to be exploited. We will not shoulder this burden for the capitalists. Five years ago, we defeated our landlord's attempt to evict us. We won because of the the solidarity of our neighbors and our friends around the world. We are once again calling on that network. Our collective feels prepared for the shelter-in-place that begins at midnight throughout the bay area. The most meaningful act of solidarity for us in this moment is for everyone to go on strike together. We will have your back, as we know you will have ours. Rest, pray, take care of each other."

For millions of people who will not be able to pay their bills, this makes

employing increasingly lethal force. In many parts of the world, they are the only ones who are able to gather freely in large numbers. When police comprise the only social body that is able to gather en masse, there is no word other than "police state" to describe the form of society we live in.

There have been signs that things were heading in this direction for decades. Capitalism used to depend on keeping a massive number of workers available to perform industrial labor—consequently, it was not possible to treat life as cheaply as it is treated today. As capitalist globalization and automation have diminished dependence on workers, the global workforce has shifted steadily into the service sector, doing work that is not essential to the functioning of the economy and therefore less secure and well-paid, while governments have become increasingly dependent on militarized police violence to control unrest and anger.

If the pandemic goes on long enough, we will probably see more automation—self-driving cars pose less threat of infection to the bourgeoisie than Uber drivers—and the displaced workers will be divided up between the repression industries (police, military, private security, private military contractors) and precarious workers who are forced to take on great risk to make a few pennies. We're accelerating into a future in which a digitally connected privileged class performs virtual labor in isolation while a massive police state protects them from an expendable underclass that takes most of the risks.

Already, billionaire Jeff Bezos has added 100,000 jobs to Amazon, anticipating that his company will drive local stores everywhere out of business. Likewise, Bezos won't give his Whole Foods employees paid leave despite the constant risk they face in the service sector—though he is giving them a $2 raise through April. In short, he still considers their lives worthless, but he admits that their deaths should be better paid.

In this context, there is bound to be revolt. It is likely that we will see some social reforms aimed at placating the population—at least temporary ones to mitigate the impact of the pandemic—but that they will arrive alongside the ever-increasing violence of a state that no one can imagine doing without, insofar as it is misunderstood as the protector of our health.

In fact, the state itself is the *most* dangerous thing to us, as it enforces the drastically uneven distribution of resources that compels us to face such imbalanced distributions of risk. If we want to survive, we can't just demand more equitable policies—we also have to delegitimize and undermine the power of the state.



that governments and the global economy are heaping upon us in the context of the pandemic—not to mention all the needless tragedies they were *already* creating. Fortunately, the same structures that can enable us to survive the virus together can also equip us to stand up to them.

## Surviving the Crisis

Let's be clear: totalitarianism is no longer a threat situated in the future. The measures being implemented around the world are totalitarian in every sense of the word. We are seeing unilateral government decrees imposing total travel bans, 24-hour-a-day curfews, veritable martial law, and other dictatorial measures.

This is not to say that we should not be implementing measures to protect each other from the spread of the virus. It is simply to acknowledge that the measures that various governments are implementing are based in authoritarian means and an authoritarian logic. Think about how much more resources are being poured into the military, the police, the banks, and the stock market than into public health care and resources to help people survive this crisis. It's still easier to get arrested for loitering than to get a test for the virus.

Just as the virus shows us the truth about how we were already living—about our relationships and our homes—it also shows us that we were already living in an authoritarian society. The arrival of the pandemic just makes it formal. France is putting 100,000 police on the streets, 20,000 more than were deployed at the high point of the *gilets jaunes* protests. Refugees in need of asylum are being turned away along the borders between the US and Mexico and between Greece and Turkey. In Italy and Spain, gangs of police attack joggers in empty streets.

In Germany, the police in Hamburg have taken advantage of the situation to evict a self-organized refugee tent that had been standing for several years. Despite the quarantine, the police in Berlin are still threatening to evict an anarchist collective bar. Elsewhere, police dressed in full pandemic stormtrooper regalia raided a refugee center.

Worst of all, all this is occurring with the tacit consent of the general population. The authorities can do virtually anything in the name of protecting our health—right up to killing us.

As the situation intensifies, we will likely see the police and the military

THE NEW FACE OF STATE TYRANNY

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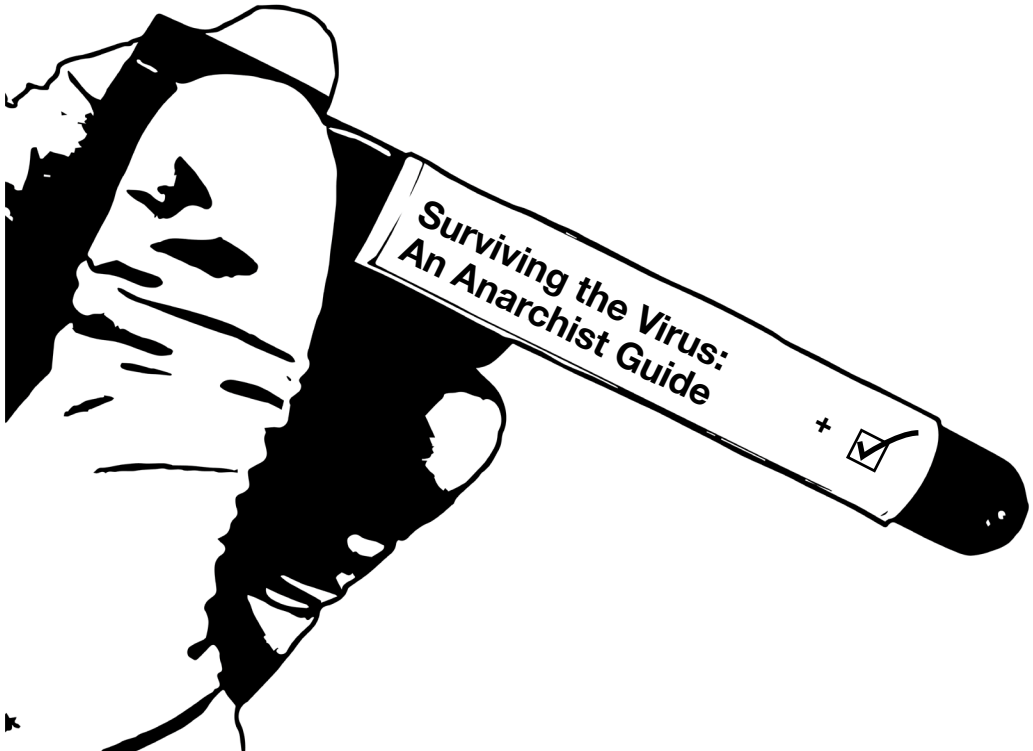


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